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AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Essays of To-day and Yesterday

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ESSAYS OF
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

AUGUSTINE
BIRRELL



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

IT is an unvarying sign of the true book-lover that he loves not only the practice of reading, but all the appurtenances thereof. He may not always feel in the mood for reading, but he is never quite happy unless he is situated so that he can read when he desires to do so. Title-pages and catalogues never lose the power to fascinate. The backs of books have for him an irresistible charm. In all matters pertaining to the bookman's faith Mr Birrell is in the true apostolical succession. Does he not say, for example, that the first step in forming a reading habit "is to breed an easy familiarity with the outsides of books, and to feel comfortable in their company as an ostler amongst horses"? There is much in that "*easy* familiarity," as there is also in the wise counsel, "Read what you like best. Never force your taste, but feed it." But, book-lover as he is, he is altogether too honest to claim impossibilities for the reading habit. "The love of reading is no dope or drug to buy oblivion or to shut down the fountain of tears, but even in grief it may hold out a helping hand, and, as we put it, roughly but not unfeelingly, 'pull us through' our troubles."

Mr Birrell has also the catholic taste which marks the true bookman, with a distinct predilection for rascals and vagabonds. He knows full well, for example, that he ought to hold Benvenuto Cellini up to public execration, instead of which he good-humouredly pats him on the back, murmuring, "he is so symmetrical a rascal." The "naughty boys" of literature, like

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Laurence Sterne and Bolingbroke, draw him irresistibly by their very waywardness. It is, however, in the piquant and "streaky pages" of George Borrow that he revels most of all. He, at all events, is never slow to "recognize the spell, and own it," and the one thing that seems capable of ruffling his good-humour is to hear Lavengro vilified. "If you do not like him," he says shortly, "you can leave him alone."

Born in 1850, Mr Birrell has had a varied career in letters, the law, and politics. Those who hailed with delight the appearance of *Obiter Dicta*, which came so unassumingly from the press in 1884, and have watched for the other volumes that have followed it at intervals that have been all too long will grudge the variety and wish that a little more of the time devoted to politics and the law had been spent in the service of literature. But we must be thankful for what we have, and, though there is not nearly as much as one would like, luckily there is enough of it to constitute a generous literary feast.

Thanks are due to the respective editors for permission to reprint "The Habit of Reading," from *The London Magazine*; "George Borrow," from *The Quarterly Review*; "Lord Acton" and "Evangelicalism in the Church of England," from *The Nation*; and "The Secret of Barlow," from *The New Statesman*.

F. H. P.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE HABIT OF READING	9
GEORGE BORROW	17
LORD ACTON, 1834-1902	43
THE SECRET OF BARLOW	50
EVANGELICALISM IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	63

THE HABIT OF READING

"All habits are bad." So declared an unknown aphorist, and though a grain of truth may often be discovered lurking in a magnum of error, it is perhaps as well that the name of this dogmatic gentleman should not be known, for his aphorism flies in the face—as is, indeed, very much the habit of these sayings—of another and a more famous aphorism that declares "Habit to be a second nature." Beware of paradoxes! They tickle. But so do straws. Truths never tickle. "All habits are bad" is a paradoxical saying, "Habit is a second nature" a true one.

That some habits are bad must be admitted—drug-taking, for example. And as it is not easy to distinguish generally between good habits and bad ones, I at once boldly ask this question—is it wise or foolish for a young fellow, anxious "to cleanse his way," to set about forming the fixed habit of reading?

Is it not possible—though hardly probable—that having once formed this habit of reading it may so grow upon its victim as to bring down the full weight of the dread Miltonic censure, for which room had to be found in the almost-inspired pages of *Paradise Regained*:

Many books

Wise men have said are wearisom; who reads

Incessantly, and to his reading brings not

A spirit and a judgment equal or superior

(*And what he brings, what need he elsewhere seek*)—

Uncertain and unsettl'd still remains

Deep verst in books and shallow in himself.

Really this sublime Milton of ours goes too far in

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

this parenthesis of his, "*And what he brings, what need he elsewhere seek,*" for was not this Lord Foppington's excuse for never reading anything at all, being well satisfied, so he declared, with the sprouts of his own brain?—and yet, I am sure, Milton would never have tolerated his lordship for two minutes.

Happily, however, there is no need for me to dive into this controversy, for I have nothing else on my mind but to urge upon my juniors in their laudable pursuit of pleasure, and with a view to the possible length of their days, early to form the habit—and it is a habit as much as smoking a pipe—of reading all sorts of books, long books and short ones, poetry and prose, novels old as well as new, biographies, histories, science, what you will! I say nothing against bridge or any other game of cards. Billiards is a noble pursuit. Before a chess-board I uncover as in the presence of royalty. To dominoes I was once much addicted, though now I play no more, death having robbed me of my rival. Whilst as for the sports of the field they need no advocacy. All these habits are easily formed and seldom willingly abandoned. It is hardly so with the habit of reading, for, strange to say, even when once acquired it is easily lost. How many men turned forty read anything save their newspaper! Once they may have had the habit, but, if so, they have lost it. What a melancholy picture is that of an aged and once literate statesman—on the retired list—wandering up and down his magnificent library, muttering miserably to himself, "I can no longer read."

First, then, my advice is—form the habit of reading, and, having formed it, stick to it. All habits are not bad, and some are of the very salt of life. What a glimpse into the dark abyss of melancholia is afforded by that

THE HABIT OF READING

chance remark of Balzac's in *Le Cousin Pons*, "Many a man on the brink of suicide has been plucked back on the threshold of death by the thought of the *café* where he plays his nightly game of dominoes." What a cheerful, friendly, life-sustaining habit! How right I was to be fond of dominoes! Yet regarding life as a whole, as something to be endured and if possible enjoyed, from its beginning to its maybe solitary end, from *Robinson Crusoe* to *The Three Musketeers*, from *The Three Musketeers* to *War and Peace*, I am certain that there is no greater gift of fortune than to have acquired and retained the power to "go back to one's book" with eagerness and joy.

How is this habit to be acquired?

The first step is to breed an easy familiarity with the outsides of books, and to feel comfortable in their company as an ostler amongst horses.

How is this familiarity to be obtained?

The run of a large library is almost essential, and in these days, when really fine libraries are to be found in all quarters of the town, this is not very difficult. To get to know the books as they stand on their shelves is a pleasant increase of one's acquaintances. That is Walpole in Peter Cunningham's nine volumes, there is Gibbon in twelve (for he cannot be read in less). That long, dusty series must be *The Annual Register*. There surely is Boswell in Dr Hill's six volumes, and Johnson's own works in either nine or twelve. How many volumes does Fielding occupy, how many Richardson, and how many Sterne? These, believe me, are not foolish questions. As the Alpine expert can pick out his peaks from the terrace at Berne, so the book-lover, on entering a library, even a municipal library, finds himself at home.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

The book-reader, as he grows in maturity, is not likely to be altogether content with municipal libraries, but it is not given to many of us to possess thirty thousand volumes, and most of us find it difficult to stow away even five thousand in the home for heroes where we are condemned to live. But the familiarity of which I have been writing, though only to be gained from access to large libraries, and the study of second-hand booksellers' catalogues and the run of their shops, in no way leads to discontent with the few volumes we happen to possess of our very own. No sensible man envies the Bodleian, or wishes that the catalogue of his library should be in a hundred volumes.

To repeat my point, the habit of reading, if it is to become so confirmed as to bid defiance to the crust of middle age, is best fostered and stimulated by cultivating in as many ways as possible an extreme familiarity with both the outsides and the title-pages of good books. I have known men of university breeding who are positively as uneasy in the presence of a book as Mr Gladstone used to be in the company of a Nonconformist minister of religion. I am not blaming them, for they may possess other and equally enduring tastes, but I am only concerned to make out that amongst men's habits, the habit of reading, if persisted in to the end, is one of the most pleasure-giving, and is—probably—the most lasting.

The next step to take, after establishing a certain measure of easy familiarity with books as *things*, like the ace of clubs or the king of diamonds, is to gratify your natural tastes by setting yourself more or less diligently and day by day to read what you like best. Never force your taste, but feed it. Even reading what you like best after such a fashion as to form an enduring habit demands

THE HABIT OF READING

an effort of the will and an occasional forced discipline. It is easy to lay down a book half read and to forget to take it up again, and this is all the easier when there is no particular occasion ever to take it up again, for I am not thinking of any such pursuit as "reading for an examination," but of reading for the pleasure of reading and nothing else.

It is amazing how this habit of reading for pleasure slips clean out of people's lives. It often seems completely forgotten. The books may be on the shelves, but they are seldom taken down, and they remain unexercised. Sometimes they are not on the shelves at all, and then what a cruel fate it is for any child to be born within those bookless walls.

How shocking it would have been to come into a house which did not contain *The Essays of Elia*, or the novels of Scott and Dickens! Yet even as it is, when cheap and excellent reprints abound and household libraries are enormously improved, the habit of reading for pleasure is by no means general.

This habit once formed, and so formed as to become "a second nature," secures that the path through life, however narrow and stony and unromantic in its surroundings, often becomes pleasant and at times exciting. The bank clerk with a good book awaiting him in his rooms walks home after dining in Soho with a light step and shuts the door behind him with a bang. Has he not *Phineas Finn* to finish? Or is he not in the middle of Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion*? One good book leads to another, and opens out new vistas of endless enjoyment. Is it not worth while to learn French in order to read Dumas, Balzac, and Anatole France, to say nothing of hundreds of other delightful French books in every branch of human intelligence?

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

It never does to ride a hobby too hard. An over-drawn banking account, a solitary hearthstone, a silenced, childish voice on the staircase—these are things not to be robbed of their sting by all the best books in the universe. The love of reading is no dope or drug to buy oblivion or to shut down the fountain of tears, but even in grief it may hold out a helping hand, and, as we put it, roughly but not unfeelingly, “pull us through” our troubles.

Why, then, should we neglect this source of comfort and enjoyment? By never forming this habit, or by allowing it to die down at forty and drop out of life, we are exposing ourselves unnecessarily to hours of boredom, *ennui*, and depression. As we grow older it is not much that life has to offer us. “My grief lies onward and my joy behind,” is one of the many sad lines in Shakespeare’s sonnets, but it is one most of us are forced to repeat every day, either with a grim smile or a barely concealed tear.

A reading man can always find something to read, for even good books in your own line are often mysteriously overlooked for years. You knew about them, but, somehow, you had never read them. I have just finished reading for the first time one of the most interesting of English biographies in two stout volumes. I have been long familiar with their outsides in libraries and bookshops, but until the other day, when I bought a copy coming from the library of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, I had never held them in my hands. I am referring to the well-known life of Sir Joshua Reynolds, by Leslie, R.A., and Tom Taylor, published in 1865. The book covers familiar ground, and told me over again some of the best-known stories of the England of the eighteenth century—stories of Johnson

THE HABIT OF READING

and Burke and Gibbon, of Goldsmith, of Garrick and Wilkes, etc. But in the background of the picture was the figure of the mild but pleasure-loving painter, the most 'invulnerable' of men, and all the old stories gathered a new lustre. What a record it is of a painter's life! What a list of great pictures, and of generations of fair women both as children and as mothers! Sir Joshua's sitters—his soldiers, his sailors, his poets, his actors, his statesmen, his fair and frail beauties, are by themselves a dictionary of national biography. Then his dinner-parties! It would be a pleasant employment for two or three evenings to go through the two volumes and make out a list of his dinner-parties, and of the men and women with whom he sat at meat—the best company that ever met in England.

I don't know that I have ever enjoyed a book more, which is a good deal for a septuagenarian to admit.

And now, having formed this habit of reading, how is it to be retained past middle age when we are so apt, like Eton boys, "to grow heavy"? Herein I fear the patient must minister to himself, yet it may be worth while inquiring why we should run this risk in the middle passage of our lives. What is the philosophy of it? Why should there be this deadening of the soul? Perhaps only a poet can tell us. Listen then to Matthew Arnold:

Dear saints, it is not sorrow as I hear,
Nor suffering that shuts up eye and ear
To all which has delighted them before,
And let us be what we were once no more !
No ! We may suffer deeply, yet retain
Power to be moved and soothed for all our pain
By what of old pleased us, and will again.
No ! 'Tis the gradual furnace of the world,
In whose hot air our spirits are unfurl'd

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Until they crumble, or else grow like steel,
Which kills in us the bloom, the youth, the spring,
Which leaves the fierce necessity to feel
But takes away the power—this can avail
By drying up our joy in everything,
To make our former pleasures all seem stale.

GEORGE BORROW

"Tachipen if I jaw 'doi, I can lel a bit of tan to hatch: N'tetist I shan't puch kekomi wafu gorgies.

"And, forsooth, if I go thither, I can choose a place to light a fire upon, and shall have no necessity to ask leave of these here Gentiles."

The above sentence, dear reader, I heard from the mouth of Mr Petulengro the last time that he did me the honour to visit me at my poor house, which was the day after Moldivvus 1842.¹

DEAR reader, do you recognize the spell and own it, or does it let you pass harmless by? If you do not care about Mr Petulengro—and though the gypsy fire on the lonely heath may be romantic, "these here Gentiles" is plainly vulgar—there is nothing more to be said. The gypsy fellow cannot wage his battle with you, as he compelled Lavengro to do, "with his naked mawleys."

The tussle commenced, and when it had endured for about half an hour, Mr Petulengro said, "Brother, there is much blood on your face; you had better wipe it off"; and when I had wiped it off, and again resumed my former attitude, Mr Petulengro said, "I think enough has been done, brother, in the affair of the old woman."

Much blood is shed in the pages of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*, the blood of braggart Coachmen and Flaming Tinmen, of jockeys and of bruisers, and quite enough has been done in this way in the affair of George Borrow. If you do not like him you can leave him alone. Nothing is easier in these days, when the new

¹ *Gypsies of Spain*, vol. ii, p. 145.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

books of a single year would (were anyone unfortunate enough to possess them) occupy all the shelves of a large library, than to leave a dead author alone. On the other hand, nothing is harder, if so be the dead author is one of "the small transfigured band" within whose pages there still lives imprisoned a restless, breathing spirit.

I now took up the third book; it did not resemble the others; the binding was of dingy calf-skin. The first object on which my eyes rested was a picture; . . . there was a human figure upon the beach, wild and uncouth, clad in the skins of animals, with a huge cap on his head, a hatchet at his girdle, and in his hand a gun; his feet and legs were bare, he stood in an attitude of horror and surprise, his body was bent far back, and his eyes, which seemed starting out of his head, were fixed upon a mark in the sand—a large, distinct mark—a human footprint.

There was no need for Lavengro to exclaim as he does, "Hail to thee, spirit of De Foe!" Which of us does not remember that picture, and those most moving words, the sound of which will continue to murmur in Anglo-Saxon ears so long as the Atlantic surge breaks upon our coast?—"It happened one day about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand." These are the things we love in literature, the print of a man's naked foot in the sand; and wherever we open *The Bible in Spain*, *Lavengro*, or *The Romany Rye*, there we see very plainly a large distinct mark—the footprint, the naked footprint, of George Borrow. Poor Robinson, on his desert island, was terribly put about by the sight. "I stood like one thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an apparition. Sometimes I fancied it must be the devil." But in the pleasant realms of literature, of the book-

18

GEORGE BORROW

shelf and the tobacco-jar, we are not easily scared, even at the witching hour of midnight, and we hail the naked footprint with a delight that permeates the marrow and expands the midriff; nor do we care a rap how the footprint came to be there, or anxiously inquire about the character of the man who was thus happily endowed by Nature with the one literary gift worth having, namely, the power of leaving it there. Enough for us that there it is.

George Borrow had naturally enough to put up with a good deal of hostile criticism at the hands of his contemporaries. The Lord Chief Justice of England observed the other day very forcibly in the course of an address to the jury in a libel case, that if a man chooses to publish a book in which he roughly assails the character of Queen Elizabeth, he must expect to be hustled by those sturdy patriots who venerate the memory of the high-spirited Lady who founded our navy, resettled our religion, and gave us a poor-rate. George Borrow attacked "with his naked mawleys" many people and many things dear to the minds and memories of the men and women of his day; nor was he by any means a scrupulous fighter or a very perfect gentle knight. Indeed, it must be admitted he was somewhat of the bravo, and did not when angry spare age or even sex. True it is he seldom fails to bid us observe that he is a member of the Church of England, and even when in Wild Wales he would have nothing to do with Dissenters. But for all this he clearly did not belong to the respectable party within the Establishment; and although no doubt it was a fact that he spent nearly five years in *ventas* and *posadas* in Spain, "whilst wandering through the country in the arduous and unthankful task of distributing the Gospel among its children," it is none

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

the less true that the fascinating record of his labours contains passages and employs a phraseology which gave serious umbrage to his staid employers, whilst on the other hand affording infinite comfort and delight to their half-starved children, searching their barren bookshelves for literary sustenance. With the quarrels of the quarrelsome no one need concern himself. George Borrow, after he had escaped from the clutches of the London publisher and had fought the Flaming Tinman in the Staffordshire dingle, still haunted by the stately shade of Isopel Berners, had no real cause to complain of the nature of things. *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* did not indeed meet with the success that made *The Bible in Spain* the book of the season. But what of that? Between the first edition and the second of *Sartor Resartus* there stretched long years. We dare say it was hard to be told by the *Athenæum* that *Lavengro* could scarcely be called a book at all, and by "a rich Scotch dandy named Sterling," in the pages of *Fraser*, "that the story of *Lavengro* will content no one"; but had Borrow been a true philosopher he would not have found such ineptitudes so intolerable as he did. His friend Dr Thomas Gordon Hake, a man of marked originality, and by the testimony of his friends of rare humour, had the wit to see, and the sense to write, in the *New Monthly* for April 1851, that "*Lavengro's* roots will strike deep into the soil of English letters." Never was prophecy better fulfilled, or a happy image more completely justified. *Lavengro* has struck deep. At this time, when the newspaper-presses hum around us, and impart even to the library something of the damp atmosphere and noisy clatter of a Lancashire mill, and when every kind of artifice is employed both to gauge and to swell popularity, when books are 'listed,' and

GEORGE BORROW

writers 'run,' when publishers send forth their catalogues illustrated with portraits of their clients, and enriched with paragraphs impartially expounding the merits of their publications, it is wise and should be easy to forget that these are not the channels down which the true literary tradition is transmitted, nor are these the moulds in which are cast the enduring reputations. Literature can take care of herself, and can well afford to bestow a good-natured smile upon the efforts, the legitimate efforts, of men who, having sunk money in the concern, naturally desire to get a good trade interest upon the capital so employed. Disraeli, in one of his delightful letters to his sister, letters which in our natural eagerness for a biography we sometimes overlook, says:

Washington Irving's works have been read of late only by the author, who is daily more enamoured of these heavy tomes. He demanded for the new one a large price. Murray murmured. Irving talked of posterity and the badness of the public taste, and Murray said that authors who wrote for posterity must publish on their own account.

Nor is there anything in this, when you come to think about it, so remarkably unreasonable.

The fame of Borrow has come down to us by the legitimate channels: he has never been without his untought votaries. True it is that some of his best books were left for years in the old editions to circulate themselves as best they could, even as once was the Bible in Madagascar, with such marvellous results. But *The Bible in Spain*, at all events, has never suffered even a temporary eclipse. Separated, after the first gush, by decent intervals, as becomes a classic, edition after edition appeared, to satisfy an affectionate if not vehement demand. In quiet places and in noisy streets, in dull chambers in London, in pleasant country rectories

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

and college gardens, in easy-chairs beneath summer trees, at the bottom of boats, in ships on the sea, in both hemispheres, men and women, boys and girls, were to be found reading and rereading *Lavengro*, *The Romany Rye*, *The Bible in Spain*, and *Wild Wales*; and as they read, and still more as they reread, did they become the custodians of the Borrow tradition, the conservators of his fame, and the missionaries of the faith that, be Borrow's faults what they may, and saving all just exceptions, the man who had studied the Welsh Bards, translated Kœmpe Viser, and been under the tutelage of Mr Petulengro and Tawno Chikno, had become a deathless British author.

For some years past Borrowians all the world over have been moved and stirred; first by the rumour and afterwards by the announcement, in Mr Murray's List of Forthcoming Works, that a *Life*, authoritative and exhaustive, of Borrow was being prepared by an American gentleman of erudition and boundless enthusiasm, in which we should learn many things we had long wanted to know, things which would enable us to annotate our copies of Borrow even as that spiteful book of the spiteful and Reverend William Beloe, *The Sexagenarian*, stands annotated upon the shelf. The forthcoming *Life of Borrow* was much talked about and a most befitting mystery long invested its author. We were told how for the love of Borrow he had abandoned college and university, home and country, sold his Lares and Penates, and like his hero taken to the road and the caravan. In our rambles through East Anglia we have come upon traces of this itinerant investigator. He had even been seen in Spain, so it was asserted: he had ridden by night, a dim figure, into Villafranca; he had been heard of at Valladolid; nor had he failed, on

GEORGE BORROW

reaching our shores, to seek out in distant Cornwall "the place called Trethinnick, which being interpreted means the house on the hill." East Dereham, though apt to pay scant attention to strangers, learned to know him; and, oddest thing of all, he became an authority as to the true boundaries of Dumpling Green, where was born in 1772 Ann Parfremment, "the dame of the oval face, olive complexion, and Grecian forehead." "There is a reflection in the mirror behind thee, a travelling hat, a grey head, and a sunburnt face. 'My dearest son.' 'My darling mother.'" Ann Parfremment, Borrow's mother, was born at Dumpling Green, which, so this traveller from across the seas tells us, is bounded on the north by East Dereham, on the east by Badley Moor, on the south by the brook Tud, and on the west by the highway to Yaxham.

The Borrovian heard all this without surprise. Who should stir enthusiasm and make a Professor take to the road if not George Borrow? It was not, then, surprise we felt, but anxiety lest something should happen to prevent the publication of *The Life of George Borrow* by Professor Knapp. Other Lives have been promised, and somehow have failed to appear; Borrow has been dead nearly twenty years; and—who knows?

Happily the *Life*, to employ stock phraseology, "now lies before us," and to its carefully composed and detail-loving pages we refer our readers,¹ with perfect confidence that if they are Borrovians they will be grateful to Professor Knapp for the fruits of a lifetime's devotion. Like *Clarissa Harlowe*, the *Life* has been terribly cut down. The author's account of its origin and progress is very interesting. Professor Knapp's first acquaintance

¹ *Life, Writings, and Correspondence of George Borrow*, by William I. Knapp. Two vols., John Murray, 1899.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

with Borrow's books (for the *man* he never saw) began in 1852 or 1853, when he first entered college; a long residence in Spain enabled the predestined biographer of Don Jorge to tread many times the lines of travel of the marvellous *colporteur*. When Borrow died, in 1881, a more than half-forgotten man in what are sometimes called 'literary circles,' the Professor made a collection of all his books and fugitive pieces, and eventually secured (what cannot the born collector or predestined biographer secure?) his papers, the correspondence of half a century, his notebooks of travel, his manuscripts, and the scattered remains of his library.¹ Thus initially equipped, the Professor wrote a pamphlet at New Haven, U.S.A., in the year 1887, and pledged himself, were time only granted him, to produce a biography. But when he essayed this task it was brought home to him that the *Life of Borrow* could only be written in Norfolk, and after a considerable sojourn in its most famous city, and therefore Professor Knapp made up his mind to go to Norwich, but he had to wait seven long years before he was actually free to do so.

The termination of the septennate [says this truly heroic biographer] found me domiciled in Norwich, exploring its mute memories and its treasures. The first year (1895) was devoted to a careful reading of the *Chronicle*, the *Iris*, and the *Mercury*, from 1800 to 1833, in testing the 'fictions' of *Lavengro* in the light of 'the truth' of contemporary data, and in familiarizing myself with the places and traditions, the abodes and haunts, of my hero. . . . The second

¹ One budget of letters—those written to the British and Foreign Bible Society, the basis of *The Bible in Spain*—Professor Knapp was unfortunately unable to get sight of. He made repeated attempts, but they could not be found. Strange to say, they have recently turned up, just where they were expected to be, but too late for the biography.

GEORGE BORROW

year (1896) saw the composition of the *Life* half completed; but alas! on a scale much too minute and exhaustive, as the publishers were not slow to assure me. Bowing to their cooler judgment as the thermometers of opinion, the whole was rewritten in '97 and concluded in the present year on a more conservative scale. This is all I need to tell of the history of the book. *Con lo dicho basta y sobra!*

A biography thus conceived, thus wrought, and thus brought forth deserves to be treated with the utmost respect.

There is one remark we feel we must make. Professor Knapp is an enthusiast who has kept his head. His judgments are cool and well considered; he is indeed singularly free from even the ordinary bias of the biographer. He is by no means unduly kind to his hero's virtues, and certainly he is not even a little blind to his faults. More than once we found ourselves marvelling at his moderation, and half inclined to kick against his impartiality. Even in the region of mere conjecture he leans to the side of severity. For example, he is prepared to attribute Borrow's fierce and savage but deeply suggestive and thought-provoking attack upon Sir Walter Scott, in the famous appendix to *The Romany Rye*, to the mere supposition that Borrow sent Sir Walter in 1826 a copy of the *Romantic Ballads*, and that the sorely over-taxed author of *Waverley*, who was perhaps more "exposed to authors" (to use the great Duke's striking phrase) than any other man who ever lived, forgot to acknowledge it. If it was so, Sir Walter was indeed unlucky. How many fools did he suffer, if not gladly, yet civilly, whilst forgetting to acknowledge communications from two such formidable tonguesters as George Borrow and Thomas Carlyle! For our own part, we think there is more in the appendix than mere wounded *amour propre*.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Again, Professor Knapp, with an almost Levitical scorn, leaves the philology of *Lavengro* severely alone. He will have nothing to say to it. Perhaps it does not matter now. In heaven, we are told, there is but one language. The fact is that the amateur, however brilliant, is no longer allowed to gallop his Pegasus in the paddocks of Science. Borrow, it appears, was in the habit of applying to his wife, as a term of endearment, a Spanish word which means 'dray-horse,' his presumable intention being to say "Beloved one." There is much to be said in favour of your mother tongue.

There is one question before all others that the Borrowian is eager to put. He may indeed seek to conceal his anxiety; he may profess an indifference by saying, "What do I care whether *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* be true or not?"—but he does care. It ought not perhaps to matter much; perhaps not at all: fiction is every bit as good as fact, and, indeed, who can tell the difference? "*Le Vrai n'est pas toujours le Vraisemblable*," as Borrow himself observes in the introduction to the English translation of Vidocq's *Memoirs* (4 vols., 1829), which we now learn for the first time—and sorry we are to know it, for the original is both dull and disreputable—was the handiwork of *Lavengro*. None the less, we all do want to know how much of Borrow's books is *Wahrheit* and how much is *Dichtung*. Professor Knapp's answer is, we hasten to say, as satisfactory as possible. "You may believe as much of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* as you choose," i.e., every bit as much as you would have believed had they appeared under the sober and convincing title, *The Early Life of George Borrow, Agent of the Bible Society*. The books are strictly autobiographical, and give as full, true, and particular an account of their author, from his birth

26

GEORGE BORROW

on the 5th of July, 1803, at East Dereham, until the autumn of 1825, as it was possible for him, being what he was, to give to anybody. If you want an answer to the famous question "What is truth?" you must, of course, study the case of "Derry v. Peek," in the House of Lords 14 Appeal Cases 337; and there you will learn, among many other things, that it is impossible for any statement of fact to be absolutely true, and that truth in the mouth of any man is a thing not absolute, but relative to the belief of the speaker. How much of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* did George Borrow believe to be true? Unhesitating is our answer: "All or nearly all."

It is well to get it into our heads, and it is no fault of Professor Knapp's if the fact does not permanently reside there, that the five volumes of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* are but the record of twenty-three years, and indeed it would be more accurate to say of but sixteen years; for though it is true that the moving incidents of the visit to Hythe churchyard, where in a low-eaved pent-house lay ranged the skulls of the Danes, and of the reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, belong to the first seven years of Borrow's life, the real grip of *Lavengro* is not felt, the naked footprint does not appear in the sand, until 1810, when his father's West Norfolk regiment was ordered to Norman Cross, in Huntingdonshire.

Merely to attempt to recall all the scenes and incidents and "extraordinary individuals," all the odd adventures and scraps of conversation that he met with, from the viper-hunter of Norman Cross to the horse-fair at Horncastle, is to be bewildered. If ever man had the gift of describing a ramble or a roadside adventure, the changes of a summer's day or the fitfulness of moods,

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

and of investing the most familiar surroundings, village inns, and commons, even Blackheath, with the mystery of the desert, it was George Borrow. His relapses into the commonplace are as full of craft as the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*. His method of importing into his narrative a sense of wonder and impending change is his own. It is easier to say what it is not than what it is. It is the very opposite of Hawthorne's, who, by his exquisite choice of words, his dreamy philosophy, his subtle humour, his sense of the infinite, makes New Salem and Miss Pyncheon's poor little shop swim in an atmosphere of romance. Compared with Hawthorne, Borrow is blunt and brutal, but he can produce his own effects in his own way. De Foe no doubt taught him never to be afraid of detail, even of apparently dull detail. Verisimilitude without detail is impossible. Clothe your lies in the garments of circumstance! Naked truths seldom gain admittance in the respectable households of Faith. The disreputable Vidocq may have suggested to Borrow's more artistic sense what excellent use can be made of conversations if skilfully reported. The conversations in Borrow are of the very first order. Fielding may have reminded him how effective in a narrative of constant movement from place to place are bursts of eloquence. Whatever be the theme, Borrow's eloquence is magnificently courageous: he is never afraid of an apostrophe. In the now forgotten language of the prize-ring the tongue, that "little member," used to be called "the red rag." Borrow was always ready to hoist his "red rag" over any animating subject.

There was another secret he had completely mastered: how to move his characters on and off. Never does a new one appear—and they are always appearing—but the reader smacks his lips, knowing as he well does that

28

GEORGE BORROW

the moment Borrow has done with the fellow off he will go without another word. There was once a Shakespearean enthusiast, we almost think it was S. T. C. himself, who maintained that the James Gurney who but once opens his mouth in the whole Shakespearean drama, and then only to say:

Good leave, good Philip. [*Exit Gurney.*]

was a creation of the finest art. For our part we think this is carrying things a little far, but the principle is sound. How effective in *Lavengro* is the nameless but "dapper" man who, when Borrow was standing at the corner of Oxford Street and the road to Tottenham Court watching Lord Byron's hearse go by, observed: "Great poet, sir, but unhappy. Fate of genius, sir; I too am frequently unhappy."

It was in the neighbourhood of Norman Cross in the year 1810 that Borrow, then a boy of seven, first met the gypsies, and was introduced to Ambrose Smith, the Norfolk gypsy, now known to the world as Jasper Petulengro. It is the first of the great scenes in *Lavengro*, and to think of it is to hear once more in your ears the thundering hoofs of the horse of the fierce rider predestined to a violent death, whose sudden appearance scattered the gypsies and left the little boy alone in the lane gazing after the retreating company. "'A strange set of people,' said I, at last. 'I wonder who they can be.'"

When first we heard of Professor Knapp's great undertaking, we own we did not envy him his task of pursuing in sober mood his wayward hero through the enchanted pages of his own *Dream or Life or Story*, call it what you like. It is easy enough to go to Edinburgh and sleep facing the Castle Rock; it is no

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

great hardship to cross St George's Channel and take the train to Clonmel: but this is not to do what Borrow has told us he did. Better stay where you are, and, taking down *Lavengro* from its place, read there how the boy lay on the bank of Tweed and wept, so stirred was he by the beauty of the scene, and how afterwards, with his father's regiment, he marched into Edinburgh Castle, and was sent to the High School, where adventures befell him.

"Scotland is a better country than England," said an ugly, blear-eyed lad, about a head and shoulders taller than myself, the leader of a gang of varlets who surrounded me in the playground, on the first day, as soon as the morning lesson was over. "Scotland is a far better country than England, in every respect."

"Is it?" said I. "Then you ought to be very thankful for not having been born in England."

"That's just what I am, ye loon; and every morning when I say my prayers, I thank God for not being an Englishman. The Scotch are a much better and braver people than the English."

"It may be so," said I, "for what I know—indeed, till I came here, I never heard a word either about the Scotch or their country."

"Are ye making fun of us, ye English puppy?" said the blear-eyed lad; "take that!" and I was presently beaten black and blue. And thus did I first become aware of the differences of races and their antipathy to each other.

The famous account of the "bickers" between the boys of the Auld Toon and the New, particularly the passage beginning "A full-grown baker's apprentice was at their head," is very much in the style of Fielding, though no doubt the latter author in such passages purposely intended the mock-heroic. David Haggart, of whose tragic fate Professor Knapp can tell us, perched

GEORGE BORROW

above Edinburgh on the edge of a horrible crag, thinking of wight Wallace, from whose death he declared he would not flinch could he but be a great man first; the Papist gossoon Murtagh pining for a pack of cards in the place of those his Uncle Phelim stole when he went to settle in the County Waterford—what pictures are these! The landlord at Clonmel—the Irish Protestant—who can forget his eloquence?

It cannot have been anything but difficult to follow prosaically in the wake of so phosphorescent a writer, but Professor Knapp abates neither heart nor hope, but steers right on; and as he goes he annotates, filling up dates and supplying names. How mysteriously does the grim, horrid, and hitherto unnamed figure of the murderer Thurtell (consult the *Dictionary of National Biography* for the career of this worthy) cross the path of Lavengro! He is described in the twenty-fourth chapter: one of the two men who break in upon Borrow (then an articled clerk to a Norwich attorney) and the Norfolk magistrate, who, having pocketed the thousand pounds (secured on mortgage) which Borrow had brought him, was treating this amazing limb of the law to a glass of Madeira, the first the boy had ever had. The object of the visit of the two men, one of whom was slightly known to Borrow, was to obtain the use of a pigtle (which is good East Anglian for a small enclosure of land) for a prize-fight. The magistrate refused, and thereupon Borrow's acquaintance flew into a passion and departed hastily.

With a surly nod to me, the man left the apartment; and in a moment more the heavy footsteps of himself and his companion were heard descending the staircase.

"Who is that man?" said my friend, turning towards me.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

"A sporting gentleman, well known in the place from which I come."

"He appeared to know you."

"I have occasionally put on the gloves with him."

"What is his name?"

Here the chapter ends. We now know the man's name. It was Thurtell.

But perhaps the most difficult feat even Borrow ever accomplished is connected with the name of the famous bruiser who is called in *Lavengro* Big Ben Brain, but whose real name, unless we have forgotten our lore, was Ryan, Mike Ryan, who was champion of England in 1790. Professor Knapp calls him Bryan, but whether Bryan or Ryan his name in the ring was Big Ben. Borrow's father was a gallant, hard-working, ill-paid Christian soldier, who had no luck in his profession, and whose one battle took place

neither in Flanders, Egypt, nor on the banks of the Indus or Oxus, but in Hyde Park. . . . The name of my father's antagonist was Brain.

What! still a smile? did you never hear that name before? I cannot help it! Honour to Brain, who four months after the event which I have now narrated was champion of England, having conquered the heroic Johnson. Honour to Brain, who, at the end of other four months, worn out by the dreadful blows which he had received in his manly combats, expired in the arms of my father, who read the Bible to him in his latter moments—Big Ben Brain.

You no longer smile, even *you* have heard of Big Ben.

Captain Borrow, as his life went on, became a deeply religious man, and between him and his wayward, puzzling second son there existed but an imperfect sympathy. They were however held together by one strange link—their common interest in Big Ben. The

GEORGE BORROW

name of this bruiser was as a kind of refrain in their lives, the only hymn in which both could join—his mighty chest, his skin brown and dusky as a toad's. It came to be the Captain's turn to die.

Were those words which I heard? Yes, they were words, low and indistinct at first, and then audible. The mind of the dying man was reverting to former scenes. I heard him mention names which I had often heard him mention before. It was an awful moment; I felt stupefied, but I still contrived to support my dying father. There was a pause, again my father spoke: I heard him speak of Minden, and of Meredith, the old Minden sergeant, and then he uttered another name, which at one period of his life was much on his lips, the name of—— but this is a solemn moment! There was a deep gasp: I shook, and thought all was over; but I was mistaken—my father moved, and revived for a moment; he supported himself in bed without my assistance. I make no doubt that for a moment he was perfectly sensible, and it was then that, clasping his hands, he uttered another name clearly, distinctly—it was the name of Christ. With that name upon his lips, the brave old soldier sank back upon my bosom, and, with his hands still clasped, yielded up his soul.

But we are lingering by the way. On every side strange figures beckon us to hob-a-nob with them, dog-fanciers and coachmen, Armenians and publishers, country doctors and recluses; but we hurry on. Even Sir Richard Phillips, publisher, editor, and proprietor of the *Monthly Magazine*, shall not detain us, though it is irritating to find the impartial Dr Knapp taking his part, and actually asserting that the reason why Borrow's translation into German of the *Philosophy* of this ineffable ass was a failure, was not because of the muddiness of the original composition, but because Lavengro

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

did not know German! It appears that a subsequent translation of the same book by another hand is intelligible enough.

The compilation of *Criminal Trials* which Borrow prepared for Sir Richard Phillips appeared in March 1825, and may still occasionally be had of the second-hand booksellers, a wily race, who ask a great deal more for it than its value, which intrinsically is nothing. But the question remains to be asked—is there resting anywhere on mortal shelves or buried deep in any human depository a book called *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Sell, the Great Traveller*? Dr Knapp believes that some such book exists somewhere, though it may be only in a magazine; but as he has not yet found it, the question is still open. There were Sells at Norwich, says Dr Knapp: the well-known artist was John Sell Cotman; but one cannot quite forget that there is another kind of ‘sell’ beside the Sells of Norwich, and on the whole we are disposed to agree with Mrs George Borrow, who always treated this Joseph Sell with the scepticism of a Betsey Prig.

The question is more important, what can Professor Knapp tell us of Isopel Berners, to whom he refers somewhat coldly as “the remarkable character introduced into *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*”? “Strange words they seemed of slight and scorn.” Almost as well might one speak of a remarkable character called Ophelia introduced into *Hamlet*. We should be sorry to have to determine by some rule of thumb how much of the unbought popularity of George Borrow depends upon his portrayal of this unique and fascinating girl, who had managed to learn in the workhouse of Long Melford two lessons seldom taught in such places, to fear God and take her own part, and who tipped

GEORGE BORROW

Lavengro the hint which enabled him to floor the Flaming Tinman. We forbear to rhapsodize, and regretfully add that the Professor can tell us nothing about the tall girl. Perhaps it is as well.

We have a vision of our own,
Ah! why should we undo it?

After these early years there comes a gap in Borrow's autobiographical disclosures.

The conclusion of *The Romany Rye* left George Borrow, just entered upon his twenty-third year, on the road from Spalding to Lynn and Norwich in the autumn of 1825. From that date the public heard no more of his movements till *The Bible in Spain* revealed him for an instant on the way to Russia. In his intercourse with Richard Ford he calls the interval of seven or eight years the "veiled period," which he intended to keep secret in his autobiography, then in preparation, and which he did keep secret ever after.¹

To lift veils is the duty of biographers. Professor Knapp has lifted this veil with the usual unsatisfactory result. There is not much to tell, and what is told is not as edifying as one could wish. The "veiled period" was not spent, as Borrow would have had us believe, in romantic travels, but was divided, for the most part, between London and Norwich. It was occupied in translating Danish poetry and Vidocq's *Memoirs*, and generally, to use words of his own, quoted by his biographer, "in drifting on the sea of the world." Borrow's tastes and habits, though not disreputable, were never what is called respectable; and there can be no doubt that during this uneasy yeasty period he was a headstrong

¹ *Life*, vol. i, p. 110.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

young fellow who, though he had served his articles to a bald-pated and unusually respected Norwich solicitor, took no steps whatever to be admitted upon the roll of attorneys, but, "instead of that," lived an irregular life and translated "romantic ballads." It is plain Borrow kept odd company, and was not free from the twin taints of fishing in preserved waters and of atheism. Nor was he averse from the liquor of heroes. See his ballad *Six foot three*.

Such was the really dangerous condition of Borrow when the Bible Society came to his rescue, and, amazed by his linguistic attainments, turned him into a *colporteur*. Loud was the laughter of Norwich. The Martineaus rolled in their chairs. Miss Harriet records it thus: "When this polyglot gentleman appeared before the public as a devout agent of the Bible Society in foreign parts, there was one burst of laughter from all who remembered the old Norwich days" (see passage quoted by Dr Knapp, vol. i, p. 162). We dare say it was very amusing, but *The Bible in Spain* is still more amusing, and those laugh best who laugh last. Norwich has ceased to snigger over the youthful indiscretions of George Borrow, and has long forgiven him for not becoming a junior partner in the highly respectable firm of Rackham and Simpson.

We owe *The Bible in Spain* to the Rev. Francis Cunningham, the rector of Lowestoft from 1814 to 1830, who married Richenda Gurney, the sister of Joseph John Gurney and Mrs Fry. You may read of him in Mr Hare's book, *The Gurneys of Earham*. He had for a brother the still better known vicar of Harrow, of whom (so it is said) you may read in the best-remembered novel of Mrs Trollope. The lady who afterwards became Mrs George Borrow, then Mrs

GEORGE BORROW

Clarke of Oulton, probably introduced Lavengro to Mr Cunningham, who in his turn brought him under the notice of Joseph John Gurney, by whom he was introduced to the Bible Society. There was something about Borrow which was at once attractive and alarming to this excellent Society. They admired his stature, his daring, his acquirements, but his phraseology startled them not a little. Nor were they wrong in their diagnosis. Thus does the Rev. Mr Jowett, writing from the Society's premises in London in July 1833, admonish Lavengro:

Excuse me if, as a clergyman, and your senior in years, though not in talent, I venture, with the kindest of motives, to throw out a hint which may not be without its use. I am sure you will not be offended if I suggest that there is occasionally a tone of confidence in speaking of yourself which has alarmed some of the excellent members of our committee. It may have been this feeling, more than once displayed before, which prepared one or two of them to stumble at an expression in your letter of yesterday, in which, till pointed out, I confess I was not struck with anything objectionable, but at which nevertheless a humble Christian might not unreasonably take umbrage. It is when you speak of the prospect of becoming *useful to the Deity, to man, and to yourself*. Doubtless you meant *the prospect of glorifying God*, but the turn of the expression made us think of such passages of Scripture as Job xxi, 2, xxxiv, 7 and 8, Psalm xvi, 2 and 3.

Believe me, etc.,
JOSEPH JOWETT.¹

A most excellent letter, it must be admitted, so good indeed that Borrow was moved to reply to it after a fashion that won Mr Jowett's heartiest approval.

¹ *Life*, vol. i, p. 161.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Borrow's first job for his new masters was to go to Russia and to see through the press the entire New Testament in the Manchu tongue. The translation had been made by M. Lipóftsof, who was however prevented by a Government appointment from proceeding any further with the undertaking. It was a big thing to do, and Borrow laboured at it night and day, and whilst he laboured he loved to fancy himself, as soon as the book was ready, "wandering, Testament in hand, overland to Peking by way of Lake Baikal and Kiakhta, with side glances at Tartar hordes." But *The Bible in China* is one of the books that never got itself written.

Borrow's Russian occupations engaged him from August 1833 to September 1835, when he returned home to his mother in Norwich. The *colporteur* was ever a good and affectionate son to a mother who seems always to have understood his despondent humours. Just before he left Petersburg for good she had written to him:

My dear George, do not be melancholy. You should rather rejoice and be thankful to God for assisting you to bring your work to a conclusion. I think the Bible Society will employ you; but if not, thank God you have a home to come to. I do not wish you to remain abroad. I am very lonely and shall be glad to see you. I have not spent the money you sent home.

Mrs Borrow was right, as mothers are apt to be. The Bible Society did employ her son again, first in Portugal and afterwards in Spain. The records of his labours in these fields, are they not written once and for ever in *The Bible in Spain*?

The connexion with the Bible Society was finally

GEORGE BORROW

severed in 1840, and on the 23rd of April in that year George Borrow was married at St Peter's Church, Cornhill, to Mary Clarke, the widow of Henry Clarke, R.N., and a daughter of Edmund Skepper, a lady whom he had known for some years, and who, with her daughter, who still lives, had lately paid a somewhat mysterious visit to Spain in search, so gossips said, of Lavengro himself. The marriage was fortunate. Old Mrs Borrow approved, the new Mrs Borrow was delighted, the step-daughter was more than acquiescent, and Don Jorge apparently did not mind. By the marriage Borrow became possessed of a comfortable if unpretentious home in the county he dearly loved, and entitled to his share of an income which, though not large, was enough to provide him with the beef and ale in which his soul delighted. To say that he became a happy man would be a flat untruth. He was seldom happy; like Goldsmith, he was not at peace with himself; he was restless, ambitious, jealous; but he had his good times as well as his bad, his hours of exaltation as well as of depression. He was thirty-seven years of age when, his wanderings over, he and his wife and her daughter settled down at Oulton Cottage, Lowestoft, when he at once began to arrange the manuscripts and notes he had written in the Peninsula. The first result of these labours was the *Gypsies of Spain*, which appeared from the presses of "Glorious John" in April 1841, and did fairly well; the second result was *The Bible in Spain*, which, lingering a little unduly in the press, came out in three volumes in 1843 and had a success "instantaneous and overwhelming." Borrow was very happy and exultant. Sir Robert Peel referred to him in the House of Commons. He was a great man in Albemarle Street. He felt too that he had that within him which

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

was bound to come out, and which, when it did come out, would carry him still further. He had no pious Mr Jowett by his side to remind him that it is good to be humble, and unwise to couple yourself with the Deity. Still, how natural to be proud of having written *The Bible in Spain*! Edition followed edition in rapid succession—six in the first year!

The method pursued by Borrow in the preparation of *The Bible in Spain* was this. He persuaded the Bible Society to lend him his original letters, which after some hesitation they did in June 1841. Mrs Borrow was then set to work turning the correspondence “into an unbroken narrative, connected here and there by a few strokes of the pen with the fresh composition of an episode or two not contained in the letters, such as life in the Cárcel de Corte and the journey to Tangiers.”¹ Borrow then returned the original letters to the Bible Society, in whose hands they still are. It is a strange origin for so fascinating a work.

Lavengro was next taken in hand. Professor Knapp tells its genesis at great length. It is an interesting history. The book appeared in three volumes, with Mr Phillip’s fine portrait of the author as a frontispiece, in an edition of three thousand copies. But the wind of popular favour had shifted and no longer filled Borrow’s sails, which flapped idly against the mast. The religious world looked coldly on. *Lavengro* was not placed on the shelf with *The Bible in Spain*. Many a youngster who knew pages of the earlier book by heart grew up to man’s estate without so much as hearing of “the scholar, the gypsy, the priest.” *Lavengro* seems to have puzzled the public, which has no mind to be made a fool of by a mysterious vagabond. More than twenty

¹ *Life*, vol. i, p. 383.

GEORGE BORROW

years rolled by before a second edition was called for. This seems incomprehensible to us. It seemed monstrous to Borrow, who was furious. In 1857 *The Romany Rye* appeared, calmly taking up *Lavengro* just where that book left off, without an explanatory word—an odd way of treating the book-market. Only a thousand copies were printed of *The Romany Rye*, and though a second edition was published the following year, it was a small one. Then nothing happened until 1862. Such an experience is unusual and bewildering. We doubt whether it is fair to throw the whole blame on the book-buyers of Britain. *Wild Wales*, with its striking motto from Taliesen:

Their Lord they shall praise,
Their language they shall keep,
Their land they shall lose,
Except wild Wales

—appeared in 1862, in three volumes, and in an edition of one thousand copies. In 1865 there was a second edition, and then nothing till 1888.

Old Mrs Borrow died in 1858, in her eighty-seventh year. She at all events never complained of her son. Mrs George Borrow died in 1869, aged seventy-three, well content with her choice, and Don Jorge himself followed in 1881, on the 26th of July, aged, as Professor Knapp tells us with loving minuteness, seventy-eight years and twenty-one days. He and his wife are buried in the cemetery at West Brompton. Professor Knapp, in his preface, says, "The time has not yet arrived when Borrow's place can be definitely assigned to him in English literature." We have heard the phrase before, but are unacquainted with the precise process referred to by it. An author's "definite place in English literature" sounds a little forbidding. Some allowance must

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

be made for different gustos. George Borrow will always be able to take his own part, for, marred and scarred and seamed as his books may be by passion and by prejudice, they are aglow with feeling and with the glory of life and motion. So long as English books are read at all, Borrow's will be read.

LORD ACTON, 1834-1902

WHILE Lord Acton was alive his open if ironical countenance was, to the ordinary Ignoramus, shrouded by the mystery appertaining to a man credited with enormous knowledge, wide in range and almost unfathomable in depth, who yet was content to have published nothing. This statement of the case is not strictly true; few statements are. But in the days I am thinking of the pages of Catholic periodicals were scanned by few, and to meet anyone who had read more and written less than anybody else was, in the circles then frequented, not an everyday occurrence.

Just before I met him for the first time I had been told that when he sat down to read a book (and it was rumoured that he devoured an octavo daily), the pleasure he promised himself was not the pleasure the ordinary reader hopes to derive from his labour when similarly occupied—viz., of adding something to the slender store of his knowledge (*semper aliquid addicere*), in the prayerful hope that at least a small fraction of it may remain more or less securely lodged in a faithless memory. No! Acton's was (so it was said) a keener and more unusual joy—that of discovering, as he went along, whether the man who wrote the book really knew anything about his subject, and if so, how much. Had he read *this*, had he read *that*? Was he aware of the existence of the volume on the second shelf from the top in the small room in the Public Library of Munich? As this was a kind of pleasure which had never come my way, no wonder that I gazed upon Acton with reverence and godly fear.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Dr Johnson, we all know, once declined, though fond of his dinner, to dine in the company of Kelly the dramatist on the ground that he never willingly sat at meat with a man who had written more than he had read. Knowing as I do many journalists, who are the most hospitable of mortals, I have never felt myself at liberty to adopt as a rule of conduct this Johnsonian maxim, which I am sure was honoured by the great man himself in those days of "scribble, scribble, scribble," more in the breach than in the observance; but in the case of Lord Acton any difficulty I may have felt was all the other way. How was I to demean myself before a man who had read almost everything and written almost nothing?

As the occasion of this meeting was a "Boz" dinner, I remember congratulating myself that it might possibly turn out that I knew *Pickwick* better than did even Lord Acton. It turned out quite the other way. I soon discovered, for I sat next to him, that he had read the whole of Dickens as attentively as ever did Johnson, Burke, and Gibbon the first novel of that lucky damsel Miss Fanny Burney.

After Acton's death this strange and fascinating mystery was quickly dispelled. The loyal activities of his Cambridge disciples (for he was the Founder of a School of History, and not merely a Regius Professor) who have collected the hitherto anonymous contributions to the *Rambler* and the *Home and Foreign Review* (Catholic publications usually in difficulties with the Church authorities), and who also have printed the Lectures delivered at Cambridge, have placed upon our library shelves tangible evidence of the great learning and the noble spirit of their revered Master. Mr Herbert Paul, in 1904, edited (with an illuminating

LORD ACTON

introductory memoir) Lord Acton's letters to Mrs Drew, and at the end of last year there appeared the first volume of his *General Correspondence*, edited by Dr Figgis and Mr R. V. Laurence, both good Cambridge men.

So there are now already six or seven volumes standing to Lord Acton's credit in the catalogues of the British Museum. The great *History of Liberty*, towards which from early manhood Lord Acton's thoughts were steadily set, as by a tidal wave, remains indeed unwritten, but though unwritten, its unshaped spirit stands revealed, obscurely sometimes, at others almost plainly, in every one of these volumes. It moves over the surface of their pages and succeeds in imparting to them a ghostly charm unlike anything else we have encountered in our reading.

The fact that Lord Acton belonged by birth, education, and lifelong conviction to the old religion ought not to call for particular comment. Outside this island most historians since the fourth century of our era have been in the same plight, and though our best-known English and Scottish historians have not been remarkable for their sympathy with the Church of Rome, neither have they displayed in their compositions any very obvious zeal for the Churches of the Protestant faith.

None the less the fact that Lord Acton, knowing history as he did and reading it in the serious and impassioned way he did, was yet able to remain to the end in the Church which regarded him (and who can wonder?) with constant suspicion, and in some once influential quarters with active dislike, is to me, at all events, a fact of such intense interest that I cannot bring myself to leave it alone. I think Acton would have sympathized with me; for I find him writing in a letter

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

to Mrs Drew (p. 60): "My life is spent in endless striving to make out the inner point of view, the *raison d'être*, the secret of fascination for powerful minds, of systems, of religion, and of politics." What, I wonder, was Acton's "inner point of view"? What made a history of 'Liberty,' not a history of 'Dogma,' the inspiration and the dream of a life of study and thought?

No reader of the volumes I have referred to can fail to perceive that it is only when Acton writes about morality that his words, which on other subjects are apt to be cold and cumbersome, glow with the fervour usually associated with the apostles of religion. That Lord Acton was throughout a good Catholic I have no doubt whatever; but whenever morality comes into conflict with the Papacy, or with Ultramontanism, down topples the Triple Crown, over goes Ultramontan-ism, and up flutters the irreproachable pennon of the moral code. I must be allowed a quotation or two to make good my point.

It is more essential that an enthusiast of the Papacy be made to contemplate its crimes, because its influence is nearer the conscience, and the spiritual danger of perverted morals is greater than the evil of perverted politics.¹

And again:

The principal obstacle in the way of Rome is the moral obstacle—the Inquisition. The principle of the Inquisition is the Pope's sovereign power over life and death. Whosoever disobeys him shall be tried, tortured, and burnt. If that cannot be done, formalities may be dispensed with, and the culprit may be killed like an outlaw. That is to say, the principle of the Inquisition is murderous.²

¹ *Correspondence*, vol. i, p. 56.

² *Letters to Mrs Drew*, p. 85.

LORD ACTON

This "inner view," this strong *motif*, explains Acton's excessive admiration for George Eliot, which has so plagued our *dilettante*. Acton was not concerned, as he says himself, "to interfere with the current opinion of her genius as a novelist." He did not care to put her in the balance with Scott or Hugo and watch critically which kicked the beam. He was in search of other game, and pursued the poor lady along another track. How came she by her morality?—for it was as a moralist that Acton bowed a head, not much given to bowing, before George Eliot.

She was a perfect Atheist. "Every one of her ideas grew up on ground absolutely Atheistic." This was, of course, a great danger. Everybody sees that there is no security that the ethics of infidelity will practically harmonise with the ethics of belief. And we possess a great body of examples in Comte, in Mill, in the revolutionary movement, of the peril to morality from rejection of the old basis of modern civilisation. Acton then proceeds to speak very harshly of George Eliot's *entourage*, "the group of rather vulgar free-thinkers among whom she lived till she was past thirty." "George Eliot had no contact with anything else." "Her whole soul drew its inspiration from doctrines repudiating all the spiritual world and the motives that belonged to it." "She was steeped in all that is most dangerous to conscience."¹

And yet—here comes the wonder—her moral teaching is very high:

From the depths of Atheism, from its worst school, from the midst of the poorest surroundings, a preacher of lofty virtue arose, not at all perfect indeed, or absolutely consistent, but far more impressive, more true, more elevated than any but the very best of Christian writers, and capable of

¹ *Correspondence*, vol. i, pp. 289, 294.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

reaching those whom no Christian could possibly touch. To me this is one of the most wonderful feats in the history of the human mind.

George Eliot had, indeed, one grave blot on her moral escutcheon, "her tolerance for Mazzini." "That," writes Lord Acton in a letter to Mrs Drew (p. 210), "is a criminal matter, independent of the laws of States and Churches." Acton had one law for Pope, Saint, or Revolutionary: "Thou shalt do no murder!" A breach of the moral law was to him, as a believer in God, a sin, and he believed that it is indifference to sin, and not disputes about creeds, that gives rise to our internal religious conflicts.¹

All borderlands, marches, boundaries of Empire are romantic. Was ever a book of travels so happily named as *Where Three Empires Meet*? Russia, China, Britain, all assembling themselves together on the summits of a far-distant and unfamiliar chain of mountains. But there are other borderlands and boundaries, at least equally fascinating. The delimitations of Religion and Morality might easily keep a Boundary Commission of philosophers hard at work for a century. To say, as some lightly do, *e.g.*, that Christianity—to name only one religion—and morality are two sides of the same shield, is to assert what Lord Acton must have denied; for whenever Mr Gladstone showed any tendency in this direction, Acton lost no more time than was spent in the post to do his very best to nip it in the bud.

Mr Arnold begins his fine poem, *Morality*, by pointing the contrast between Man and Nature, the former harassed by the obligations of morality, his tender mouth so torn by what Sir Philip Sidney, in one of his sonnets,

¹ Letters to Mrs Drew, p. 131.

LORD ACTON

calls the harsh "bit" of Virtue that he champs and foams; the latter, free, light, and cheerful; but the poet concludes by imagining Nature to be greatly struck with Man's serious air, and makes her exclaim:

Yet that severe, that earnest air,
I saw, I felt it once; but where?

I knew not yet the gauge of time,
Nor wore the manacles of space;
I felt it in some other clime,
I saw it in some other place.

'Twas when the heavenly home I trod,
And lay upon the breast of God.

If the poet is right, and a poet is at least as likely to be right as any other person, at the back of the Infinite, the Conscience of Man and the Spirit of external Nature once reposed together in the breast of God. But where was the Spirit of Religion? It is perhaps only a question of Precedence; if so it can be safely left to the Boundary Commissioners.

THE SECRET OF BARLOW

ECCELESIASTICAL controversies wax and wane so curiously in this England of ours that names once familiar go out of our minds and undergo a long period of occultation before they again leap into the light. Consequently, when told the other day that there was a new book about "Barlow," we found ourselves wondering, "What Barlow?" and our thoughts at first ran in the direction of that detestable tutor in *Sandford and Merton*, but afterwards took a pleasanter turn as we recalled the great Lancastrian cricketer, whose fame is now for ever kept secure by the touching lines of Francis Thompson, with their haunting, unforgettable refrain:

Oh, my Hornby and my Barlow, long ago.

A glance at the Rev. Mr Barnes' book ¹ when it came our way at once cured these vagrant fancies and sent us back to a dim, distant and dark morning in December 1559, when, at the uncomfortable early hour of 5 A.M., Elizabeth's new Archbishop of Canterbury—Cardinal Pole having conveniently died four days before Queen Mary—Matthew Parker was consecrated in the Chapel of Lambeth Palace.

By whom was Parker consecrated? By William Barlow, a former Bishop of St Asaph, of St Davids, of Bath and Wells, and now about to be translated, for the third time of asking, to Chichester. Barlow first became

¹ *Bishop Barlow and Anglican Orders: A Study of the Original Documents*, by Arthur Stapylton Barnes, Domestic Prelate to H.H. Benedict XV. (Longmans.)

THE SECRET OF BARLOW

a bishop in King Henry's reign in January 1536, but being away in Scotland at the time on public business managed before his return home to get himself translated from St Asaph to the richer see of St Davids, and was confirmed as bishop of the latter diocese in Bow Church in the same year by Cranmer. We may as well add, for the information of some of our readers, that Barlow began his life "in religion" as an Augustinian canon, but at the date of Parker's consecration was a married man (his wife, Agatha, was once a nun) and was blessed with a family of five daughters, all of whom he lived to see become the wives of Protestant bishops. That Barlow was a bishop *de facto* can be disputed by no one; he had acted as such for many years before 1559; had ordained numberless priests; had sat both in the House of Lords and in Convocation and had, as all tourists to St Davids know, stripped the Palace of its roof, for the sake of the lead, thereby reducing a noble building to a lovely ruin. What, we wonder, can have been the matter with Barlow, and why this book about so unedifying a character!

The point in dispute is—was Barlow ever consecrated; and, if he was not, was Parker ever consecrated; and if Parker was not consecrated, what becomes of the Orders of the Anglican clergy who trace their succession through bishops on whom he laid his archiepiscopal hands?

It is admitted that the date of Barlow's consecration cannot be ascertained, nor is there any tradition or documentary evidence to show that it ever took place.

Mr Barnes tells us that this documentary evidence might be expected to be found in thirteen places of record, but in no one of them has it yet been discovered.

On the other hand, as our author frankly admits, it

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

is difficult to prove a negative, and such great authorities as Dr Lingard on one side and Dr Stubbs on the other seem to have entertained no doubt that, although a bishop's consecration usually leaves behind it many documentary traces, Barlow's consecration *must* have taken place ere he took upon himself to act episcopally in the diocese of St Davids.

Both the new Archbishop, who was a learned man, and his royal mistress were extremely anxious—being well aware that they were crossing a dangerous stream in the eye of Christendom—that there should be no flaw in Parker's succession, and it is hard to believe that they would select as consecrator a bishop who had never been consecrated himself. It is just possible that neither of them knew that Barlow had never been consecrated, though Parker was very intimate with Barlow, and afterwards allowed one of his sons (afterwards a bishop) to marry one of Barlow's daughters. Again, we cannot forget that the Bishop of St Davids was a very quarrelsome and unpopular man with his clergy, and was indeed once prosecuted by his dean and chapter for heresy. It is very hard to believe that no one of his alert, local clerical foes ever routed out the "secret of Barlow," thus putting this sham "Father in God" to an open shame.

On the other hand, it was by no means an easy job to conduct Parker's consecration with a due regard to the Canon and the Civil Law. By an Act of Parliament of King Henry's, if no archbishop were available for a consecration, at least four diocesan bishops "in residence" had to be present at the ceremony, one as consecrator and the others as assistants. The Archbishop of York, though not yet actually deprived, was known *Stare per antiquas Vias*, and of the old Marian bishops

THE SECRET OF BARLOW

still for the moment "in residence" none would consent to stand by and see one married bishop consecrate another. The only Marian bishop who 'conformed' was Kitchen, the Bishop of Llandaff, but even he refused to act. We have often wondered why. If Kitchen had consented to act, the book now under notice would never have been written.

Mr Barnes tells us all about these preliminary difficulties; but, as a matter of history, Parker, after many refusals, was eventually consecrated in the Lambeth Chapel in the presence of four bishops, Barlow wearing a cope, Scory, the Bishop-elect of Hereford, Hodgkins, the Suffragan Bishop of Bedford, both in surplices, and Miles Coverdale, late of Exeter, in his Genevan gown. Dr Parker, of course, was there, accompanied by two of his chaplains, Nicolas Bullingham and Edmund Gest.

After the Gospel Barlow took his seat before the Communion Table and the other three bishops presented Parker to him to be consecrated; the Queen's Mandate was read; the new Archbishop took the presented Oaths against Rome; the litany was sung and the rest of the service gone through. At the moment of consecration all four of the bishops, contrary to the Rubric of the Book they were using, *are stated in the Register* not only to have laid on their hands, but also to have recited the words, "Receive the Holy Ghost," etc. After the service all left the chapel. [See p. 94.]

Our author, though, as already said, alive to the difficulty of proving a negative, does his very best to persuade his readers that, as a matter of fact, Barlow was *never* consecrated, although the other three bishops had, after some sort of fashion, undergone that ceremony. According to Church Law, as stated by Mr Barnes, one

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

bishop alone consecrates, and the assistant bishops do not act independently and cannot, therefore, supply defects, if any, in the consecrator; but it is hinted that some Catholic theologians incline to the opinion that if *all* the bishops taking part in the ceremony pronounce the 'charging' words in Latin, "Receive the Holy Ghost," any defect in the *status* of the consecrator is remedied. Now in Parker's case, Hodgkins, though not a diocesan bishop, had been consecrated according to the old Ordinal, while Scory and Coverdale, both Edwardian bishops, had been consecrated according to the fashion of that time. Whether Barlow was ever consecrated at all is a question which must be left to the judgment of the impartial reader.

But this treatise goes farther than this and contains a plain, outspoken charge against Queen Elizabeth and her new Archbishop and other persons, of fraudulently and criminally tampering with the Register, which may still be seen and examined in Lambeth Palace, by cutting out the original contemporaneous entry as to Parker's consecration and inserting a sham account of the ceremony of December 17th, 1559, the object of the forgery and fraud being, according to our author, to make it appear as if all four of the bishops had said the words, "Receive the Holy Ghost." Mr Barnes deals at length in his sixth chapter with this formidable accusation, and certainly seems to us to prove that the Register has been tampered with and a later account of the consecration service substituted for the contemporary one. But who now is to say whether the four bishops did actually utter the charging words, "Receive the Holy Ghost," or whether it was the discovery of Barlow's secret that induced the crime?

This book cannot fail to start the old controversy

THE SECRET OF BARLOW

afresh, and certainly demands an answer from some Anglican Churchman.

There is another way of looking at the whole question, which is likely to recommend itself to a vast body of English men and women who do not feel themselves bound to regard it through 'Church' spectacles. To make everything depend on whether or not Barlow had ever been consecrated, and to be forced to believe that if Bishop Kitchen had been induced to take Barlow's place all would have been well with Anglican Orders, or to suppose that if Scory, Coverdale, and Hodgkins had at a particular moment uttered certain words, Bishop Barlow's defect would have been cured, will strike the majority of church-going folk in England as strained and almost ridiculous. The important question to such people is, What was the *intention* of the Consecration Service? What was in the minds of Barlow, Scory, Hodgkins, and Coverdale when they laid hands on Parker, and what was in Parker's mind when he felt the pressure of those hands? All of them thought they were making an archbishop, but what sort of an archbishop?

EVANGELICALISM IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

THE Evangelicals in the Church of England have never had justice done to them. They are dismissed as a 'sect,' a word singularly inappropriate when we remember that the message of the Gospel lies at the roots of the Christian Faith, and animates all that is spiritually vital in the Roman, the Anglican, and the Protestant communities. But to be miscalled and ridiculed is no great matter, and were that all, no one need ask the question which is asked, and not infrequently, What has become of Evangelicalism in the Church of England?

But it is not all, for whilst the sacramental traditions of the seventeenth-century divines are enthroned and installed in the Establishment, and are made vocal in history, biography, sermons, essays, and books of devotion, the traditions of the Romaines, the Newtons, the Venns, and the Simeons seem to have become as faded and out of fashion as are the portraits of their professors when, by any chance, you get a glimpse of them in the frontispieces of their collected but neglected writings.

If this is so—why is it?

Among the many other advantages of having been brought up in a Nonconformist household I can reckon the opportunity of reading, very much at my leisure, the essays of that sound and honest thinker, that learned man and most determined Evangelical, John Foster, who is not by any means to be confused, as he often is by ignorant cataloguers, with another essayist of a

EVANGELICALISM

different order of merit, John Forster—the biographer and friend of Dickens.

As all elderly Nonconformists know, one of John Foster's essays bears the bold and to me, from the first hour my eye lighted on it, the singularly attractive title "On Some of the Causes by which Evangelical Religion has been rendered Unacceptable to Persons of Cultivated Taste."

As this essay occupies 206 pages of an octavo volume, the reader of to-day may judge it to have degenerated into a treatise, but Foster was an old-fashioned author, and better acquainted with Mr Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding* than with Mr Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, and had he been challenged as to the word 'essay' he could easily have cited many weighty examples justifying his use of it.

John Foster was, like Montaigne and Bishop Butler, an author of good faith—indeed, of *strictissimæ fidei*—and, having set himself a somewhat ungrateful task, he proceeds with it reluctantly but firmly.

Six of his reasons for this aversion (which, of course, he deplores) may be given briefly, but in his own words:

1. A meagre list of topics.
2. Uncouth religious language.
3. Commonplace, inflated to fustian.
4. An abuse of metaphors and similes.
5. A barbarous diction, giving the gospel the air of a professional thing which must have its peculiar cast of phrases.
6. The incessant repetitions of Biblical phrases, usually *modified* phrases, made by changing or adding words, by compounding two phrases into one, and by fitting the rest of the language to the Biblical phrases by an imitative antique construction.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

The force of these reasons will not be disputed by anyone whose reading has made him acquainted with the great body of Evangelical authors, on whom, collectively, Foster passes this judgment: "On the whole, it would appear that a profound veneration for Christianity would induce the wish that, after a judicious selection of books had been made, the Christians also had their Caliph Omar."

Why should this have been so with the ordinary run of English Protestant Evangelicals?

It might not unreasonably have been supposed that a devout acquaintance with King James's Version of the Bible, and the Prayer-book, would alone have been enough to purify almost any taste, to have purged the vocabulary of all but the vulgarest, and to have exorcized Bathos from the breast of Piety.

Another reason may be added to Foster's half-dozen, for it has gained force since his day. Foster died in 1843, and from that time forward there has been a growing passion for hymns both in public worship and even as an aid to private devotion. Talk about the hundred best books! Are there fifty even tolerable hymns? And yet you cannot take up a biography of any evangelically minded person who has died during the last sixty years without running the grave risk of finding it stuffed full of terrible rhymes, mixed metaphors, repulsive images, and attenuated thoughts, and of being told at the same time that these often deplorable strains were the "favourite hymns" of the departed one.

Again I ask, why should this be so? A witty divine—Rowland Hill, I think—once asked: "Why should the Devil have all the best tunes?" I am tempted to inquire, "Why should the Almighty have the worst words?"

EVANGELICALISM

I hope I shall not be told that those moments when your thoughts are holiest and your hopes highest are the very moments when you become indifferent to simplicity, dignity, and purity of diction.

Dr Johnson was probably not far wrong in his sweeping condemnation of all sacred poetry:

Faith cannot be invested by fancy with decorations. Thanksgiving is confined to a few modes, and is to be felt rather than to be expressed. Repentance, trembling in the presence of the Judge, is not at leisure for cadences and epithets. Supplication of man to man may diffuse itself through many topics of persuasion, but supplication to God can only cry for mercy.

Stately language of this character, proceeding from the gloomy depths of a sinner, who, though he could take his ease at his inn, had never learnt to do so on Mount Zion, is not likely to appeal to large congregations—so hymns there must be, but too many of them are great obstacles.

I have, I perceive, gone not a little astray from my original purpose, which was not so much to seek the reasons why the expressions of evangelical piety grate on the ear of a cultivated taste, but to ask assistance in finding out what of late has become of Evangelicalism in the Church of England. I am sure it exists, despite the hymnals, but where is it to be found, and what are its modifications?

I have just read an admirable biography¹ of a great Evangelical lady, Miss Catherine Marsh, who carried down the best traditions of Evangelicalism in the Church of England to the present times, for she died

¹ *The Life and Friendships of Catherine Marsh*, by L. E. O'Rourke. (Longmans.)

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

less than six years ago—though at the matriarchal age of ninety-four !

English Hearts and English Hands, recording her relations, Christian and human, with the navigators or 'navvies,' her Memorials of a pious young soldier, Captain Hedley Vicars, and (in a less degree) her life of her father, are three books that travelled far, and were so well received and talked about in their day as might almost have induced an onlooker of the period to believe that he lived in a Christian world.

In the pages of Miss Marsh's biography, which, save for the unwelcome incursion of a good deal of inferior versification, contain little irrelevant matter, a careful reader has no difficulty in discovering both the secret and the charm of Catherine Marsh's life and character.

Her humanity and courage gave effect to her methods, which were bold and direct. For dukes, navvies, and waiters she had the same evangel. She tackled Mr Gladstone on the sinfulness of Home Rule, and urged him to go down, first upon his knees and afterwards to the House of Commons, and withdraw the Bill from the Orders of the Day. "Oh, how grand it would be!" Mr Gladstone's reply is lost, but as he venerated Miss Marsh and valued her prayers, we may be sure it bore no trace of temper.

For Mr Froude, Miss Marsh entertained the same warm affection this much-abused historian and biographer seldom failed to excite in the hearts of good women; and when he came to die, she was able, placing perhaps too much reliance on his assurances that however differently they might express themselves they meant much the same thing, to feel convinced that her old friend "was with his Saviour."

Now Miss Marsh was by birth and breeding a

EVANGELICALISM

daughter of the Church of England, born in her father's vicarage, and living all her long life in full communion and godly fellowship with its most pious members. She corresponded freely with archbishops. Yet never, so far as appears, during her ninety-four years did the words "good Churchmanship" ever cross her lively lips, and she treasured to the end of her days the letter addressed to her on her twelfth birthday by her beloved mother, urging her to become a real Christian: "Oh, my sweet child, could you know my anxious desire to see you a real Christian!"

It must be said, though with reverence, that for all that appears in this biography, Miss Marsh might have been a Nonconformist—almost a Baptist! Was that Evangelicalism in the Church of England *circa* 1818–1912?

Another noticeable feature about this famous Evangelical was her wide acquaintance with all ranks of society. Nor was there any trace of religious 'economy.' Wherever she went she carried the message of the Gospel with her—her piety and prayers accompanied her on all her rounds. A very pleasing picture could be composed from her correspondence of the religion of those who are sometimes referred to as the nobility and gentry of the realm, in whose houses Miss Marsh, in her Evangelical character, was a welcome guest.

Yet just before I became absorbed in Miss Marsh's biography I had been rereading her friend Froude's searching book on Mr Disraeli, and had noted the following passage: "The students of English history in time to come who would know what the nobles of England were like in the days of Queen Victoria will read *Lothair* with the same interest with which they read Horace and Juvenal."

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Between the nobles of England as they move about in the glittering pages of Disraeli, and the plain, pious, hard-working personages whose names are recorded in the index to Miss Marsh's biography, there is a considerable difference, which I hope "the students of English history in time to come" will not fail to observe

I conclude by asking three questions, which, unfortunately, I have no means of answering for myself:

1. Is the Evangelical in the Church of England to-day as remote from, and unaffected by, what are called (in the Gladstonian sense) "Church Principles" as Miss Marsh appears to have been?

2. Has Evangelicalism relaxed the hold it once had upon those who may be called, for convenience of reference, the Territorial Classes? and

3. How does Evangelicalism stand with the Proletariat?

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